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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 005373

SIPDIS

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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: OEXC KMPI KU

SUBJECT: MEPI FUNDING REQUEST--SUMMER CAMP PROGRAM FOR
KUWAITI STUDENTS

(U) SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED--PLEASE HANDLE ACCORDINGLY

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Post requests MEPI grants totaling \$150,000 to support two ESL summer camp programs for non-elite Kuwaiti youth in the 12-16 age range. The local office of ChevronTexaco has agreed to fund a \$75K PAS-initiated program that would send 10 Kuwaiti boys to an ESL summer camp in the US this July, and post requests a matching \$75K MEPI grant to fund a similar program for Kuwaiti girls in the same age group for August. We also request a second \$75K MEPI grant to fund a third group of ten students in conjunction with an important Kuwaiti NGO. Post believes that according younger, non-elite Kuwaitis in the 12-16 age range an opportunity to mix with students of diverse religions and national origins in a US environment would serve to counter the lessons in insularity and intolerance they receive in Islamist summer camps in the Gulf, and would have an important multiplier effect on their extended clan and school communities. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) Post approached ChevronTexaco with a proposal to send ten Kuwaiti boys ages 12-16 from non-elite areas of Kuwait to the US for four weeks in July 2004 to participate in an English-language summer camp, and ChevronTexaco has agreed to fully fund this program with a \$75K grant to Amideast. The camp, which is located in Palm Beach, Florida, is part of the Global Language Institute run by St. Scholastica College in Minnesota and focuses on English language training for international students ages 12-17. The program will be administered by Amideast in conjunction with the Kuwait office of UNESCO. UNESCO has a program in operation in some of Kuwait's public schools that focuses on international awareness and cooperation, and can assist in getting the word out to the target schools and communities. Working with UNESCO will remind our audience that the US has rejoined this UN organization and is committed to multilateral objectives. It will also obviate the requirement to work through Kuwait's Ministry of Education, whose liberal-minded minister is regularly (and falsely) accused of seeking reform of the country's educational curricula out of pressure from the US Embassy, and who would (we think) be hesitant to do anything that could elicit more criticism from Islamists in the National Assembly.

¶3. (U) Students will be chosen based on the results of an Arabic language essay competition on the subject of the celebrated medieval Arab historian and thinker Ibn Khaldun, who prefigured the western sciences of historiography and political science in his works. The question: "In the 'Moqadema,' the great Arab historian and thinker Ibn Khaldun analyzed the cultures and peoples of his time from a perspective of respect and tolerance. What skills and abilities do you think Arab students need today to carry on that tradition of understanding and knowledge of other countries and regions of the world?" PAS staff will read and grade these essays for the benefit of the selection committee, which will be composed of ChevronTexaco, AMIDEAST and UNESCO.

¶4. (SBU) Post has also been approached by the Kuwait Teachers Society (KTS), a 15,000-member organization dominated by moderate Islamists, for help in ESL training for English teachers and students. The KTS has expressed strong interest in a similar summer camp program in the US for ten students, and we think that such a program would allow us to enhance our relationship with this important and influential educational organization.

¶5. (SBU) Goal and justification: In media reports and in conversations with mission contacts, moderate Kuwaitis increasingly express concern about the influence of conservative Islamist ideology on Kuwaiti youth, which is manifested through the agency of summer camp programs, teacher and peer pressure (as one middle school principal is quoted as enjoining her students) "to not imitate the Christian west," and promises to university and secondary school students of assistance upon graduation from a powerful Islamist network. Newspaper reports allege efforts by school administrators to impose the wearing of the traditional Muslim headscarf on girls whose parents do not want their children to wear such attire, and report Islamist

ire at mild Ministry of Education plans (as yet unfulfilled) to update social science and other curricula by removing references to Jews and Christians as enemies who seek to impose their beliefs on Muslims. At the same time liberal commentators bemoan the apparent inability of progressive elements of Kuwaiti society to offer alternative programs, saying that liberals in Kuwait offer much talk but little action when it comes to countering organized Islamist programming. Concern is particularly acute for that percentage of Kuwait's burgeoning youth population (at least 52 percent of the population is under the age of twenty, according to statistics released last December by the Ministry of Planning) enrolled in government schools in the less affluent and more conservative districts further away from Kuwait City. In these regions, traditional tribal insularity, when combined with a dearth of non-religious youth activities, makes fertile ground for conservative Islamist political messages.

16. (SBU) Goal and Justification, continued: Post believes that MEPI resources would be well spent in programs focusing on non-elite, young Kuwaitis in the 12-23 age range that emphasize tolerance, respect for other cultures, the value of hard work and other civil society norms. Among the younger segment of this group, we think that a summer camp experience in the US is one means of influence in this regard. As the recent Djerejian report points out, English language skills are a sought after commodity among young Arabs, and PD programs should use our expertise in this area to engage audiences who might not be open to other programming.

17. (U) Action requested: We request two grants of \$75,000 each to Amideast to cover two separate summer camps--one for 10 Kuwaiti girls and one for 10 boys--exactly similar to the one being funded by ChevronTexaco. According to Amideast, each of the \$75,000 grants would cover all aspects of the programs, including:

--Round trip airfare for ten students and two adult Kuwaiti escorts
--Accommodations, meals and excursions
--Health insurance
--Administrative costs
--Pre-departure orientation for students and escorts
--Meet and greet at US port of entry by AMIDEAST

Post hopes that MEPI funds will be forthcoming for these important initiatives. Thanks and regards.

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